

Preaching the Gospel of Christ in the Modern World

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I. WHY PREACH THE GOSPEL?

THE theme of today's conference, "Preaching the Gospel of Christ in the Modern World," is relevant to everyone here, not only to those who are called to preach sermons from the ambo. Each of us is called to preach the Gospel, first of all by bearing witness to it through our lives, and secondly by making it available to others. This morning I will talk about *why* we should preach the Gospel, about the prerequisites for preaching the Gospel, and finally about how to bear witness to it in our lives.

The Gospel, of course, is the sum of the message of the Christian Faith, and especially the good news that Christ has saved mankind from the eternal consequences of sin, that He has overcome the central problem of the world—death, both bodily and spiritual—by means of His Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection.

In approaching the subject of preaching the Gospel, the first question that arises is: *Why* should we be preaching the Gospel of Christ in our modern world?

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Why, indeed, when the Protestants seem to be doing it much better? They have evangelistic programs, crusades that fill stadiums, mega-churches, television channels, Christian bookstores, a Christian music industry, and all the money they could want. We Orthodox in America are small by comparison. Why can't we just concentrate on our beautiful services and our social functions, and let the evangelicals preach to the unchurched?

The answer to this question is that the Protestants, and the Roman Catholics as well, do not preach the whole, complete, and unadulterated Gospel of Christ. Only the Orthodox Church can do that, because the Orthodox Church is the true Church that Christ founded, and that has continued up to today in a continuous, unbroken line of Holy Apostolic Tradition. This is the Church against which, as Christ promised, the gates of hell shall not prevail (cf. Matt. 16:18). Right before His Crucifixion, Christ told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and lead them into all Truth. That promise was indeed fulfilled after Christ's Resurrection. But it did not cease to be fulfilled after His Apostles reposed. Christ has continued to fulfill that promise through two millennia of upheaval and tribulation; He continues doing so even now, and He will continue until His Second Coming. During our Church's history, heretical emperors, priests, bishops, and even patriarchs threatened to destroy the purity of the Orthodox Faith, but through the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Church was preserved in Truth, and the heresies were overcome.

The non-Orthodox Christian churches have preserved *some* of the Truth of the original Christian Faith. But whatever they have that is true—whether it be the Holy Scriptures, the dogma of the Holy Trinity, or the dogma of Christ's Incarnation—they have received from the original, Apostolic Church, the Orthodox Church, whether they acknowledge this or not. But, again, they possess only some of the Truth, and the rest they have distorted because they are separated from the true Church that Christ founded. Only the Orthodox Church is the repository of the pristine Gospel and the undistorted image of Christ.

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This, then, is why we Orthodox Christians are called to preach the Gospel of Christ. We have something to give that no one outside the Church can give. Since the Christian Faith is the true Faith, and the Orthodox Faith is the true form of that true Faith, we alone can give the fullness of Truth to the searching humanity of our days. It would be selfish of us to keep it to ourselves. Yes, we should care about our beautiful church services, which are the center of our life as the worshipping Body of Christ; and, yes, we should have our social functions, since we need to have fellowship with other members of Christ's Body. But, together with this, we are called to share our Faith, to *offer* it to those who have not yet been given the great gift of being part of Christ's true Church. This is a tremendous responsibility, and it's time the Orthodox Christians in this country stepped up to it. Of course, much has been done and is being done. Just in the last twenty-five years since I first discovered Orthodoxy, I've seen a tremendous growth in the Orthodox mission in this country. But we can do a lot more, and that's what we'll be looking at and discussing today.

Back in the early 1960s, when the co-founder of our St. Herman Brotherhood, Fr. Seraphim (then Eugene) Rose, was working in the brotherhood's Orthodox bookstore in San Francisco, his ruling bishop, St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, walked in, as he often did. Fr. Seraphim asked St. John a question he had been pondering: "Nearly all the peoples of the earth have had the Gospel preached to them. Does this mean that it's the end of the world, as the Scriptures say?"¹

"No," replied St. John. "The Gospel of Christ must be preached in all tongues throughout the world in an *Orthodox context*. Only then will the end come."²

This is an awesome thing to contemplate. St. John, who in other

¹ Cf. Matthew 24:14.

² Hieromonk Damascene, *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works* (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2003), p. 314.

instances demonstrated that he had the gift of prophecy, is telling us that we cannot leave it up to Protestants and Roman Catholics to enlighten the world with the Gospel. That task ultimately belongs to us Orthodox Christians. It's not enough, for example, that three thousand Chinese are becoming Christian every day, according to the latest statistics. Yes, they are becoming Protestants and Roman Catholics, and that's good as far as it goes, but they are not becoming Orthodox Christians. Ultimately, it will be up to us to preach the Gospel to them in the *Orthodox* context.

Fr. Seraphim once noted that, "When Archbishop John¹ first came to Paris from Shanghai [in the early 1950s], instead of giving a merely polite and formal greeting to his new flock in church the first time he saw them, he gave them real spiritual meat: The meaning of the Russian exile [he said] is to preach the Gospel over the whole earth, which must happen before the end of the world; and that means not just any Gospel, any kind of 'Christianity,' but Orthodoxy."²

What St. John said about the Russian exiles can be applied equally well to the diaspora of all the other Orthodox nationalities: Bulgarian, Georgian, Greek, Lebanese, Palestinian, Romanian, Serbian, Syrian, Ukrainian, etc.

Speaking of prophecy, here is one from a Greek saint of our times (not yet canonized): Elder Paisios of Mount Athos. Before his repose in 1994, he was asked by one of his spiritual sons: "Elder, today there are so many people—billions who don't know Christ and so few of them who do know Him. What will happen?"

Elder Paisios answered: "Things will happen which will shake the nations. It will not be the Second Coming, but it will be a Divine intervention. People will be searching for someone to speak to about

¹ I.e., St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco. He was glorified as a saint in 1994 by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

² Letter of Fr. Seraphim to Fr. Neketas Palassis, St. Thomas Sunday, April 23/May 6, 1973. Quoted in *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works*, p. 314.

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Christ. They will pull you by the hand: ‘Come here, sit down and tell me about Christ.’”¹

We don’t have to look into the future for this. Already, even now, people are starving spiritually. How can we give them what they need?

2. PREREQUISITES FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL

I would now like to outline three things which we should have in place in order to preach the Gospel of Christ in the modern world: First, we must *know* the Orthodox Gospel of Christ; second, we must *live* the Gospel; and, third, we must know the modern world, in order to know what we’re dealing with.

1. So, to begin with, we must know the Gospel in the Orthodox context. This means that, not only should we know the Divinely inspired Holy Scriptures, but we should know how the Church, which gave us the Scriptures, has interpreted the Scriptures through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We can know this through the writings of the Holy Fathers of the Church who have written extensive commentaries on the Scriptures, especially the book of Genesis and the entire New Testament. Almost all of these commentaries are now easily available in English. They are not hard to understand, even though some of them, like the commentaries of St. John Chrysostom, were written sixteen hundred years ago.

There is no question in our confused times that cannot be answered by a careful, pious, and reverent reading of the Holy Fathers, who give us to understand the true meaning of Holy Scripture and to know the substance of our Orthodox Faith. We must go to the Fathers in order to become their disciples, laying aside our own “wisdom” which we have acquired from the modern secular world.² When we find the consensus of the Fathers on any given issue, we find the

¹ Athanasios Rakovalis, *Talks with Father Paisios* (Thessaloniki, 2000), p. 137.

² Cf. Fr. Seraphim Rose, “The Holy Fathers of Orthodox Spirituality I,” *The Orthodox Word*, no. 58 (1974), p. 195.

teaching which has prevailed and has been upheld in the Church. Thus, we find the mind of the Church, which is the mind of Christ, since Christ is the Head of His Church.

Of course, we should read Orthodox books by some contemporary authors also, because they distill the teaching of the Fathers and bring it to bear on modern concerns. But to get a well-rounded view of the Patristic teaching, and to know which modern authors reflect more of the Patristic mind, we should not neglect to go to the writings of the Fathers directly.

The Lives of Saints and righteous ones of earlier times and of our own times are also essential reading, as are the spiritual counsels of these same saints and righteous ones. These writings give us a blueprint for our own Christian life, both instructing and inspiring us to live our lives *in Christ*, in communion with Him, and on the path to unending union with Him.

St. John Chrysostom once said: “The Christian who is not reading spiritual books cannot save his soul.” Commenting on this statement, Fr. Seraphim Rose said: “We must be constantly filling ourselves with the word of God, the Holy Scriptures, and other Orthodox literature, so that, as St. Seraphim [of Sarov] says, we will be literally ‘swimming in the law of the Lord.’ The science of how to please God and save our souls will become a deep part of ourselves that can’t be taken away from us.

“The process of Orthodox education begins with infancy, with the simplest Bible stories and Lives of Saints related by one’s parents, and it should not cease this side of the grave. If anyone learning an earthly profession devotes all his energy to studying and gaining practice in it, how much more should Christians be studying and preparing for eternal life, the Kingdom of Heaven which is ours for a short struggle in this life.”¹

¹ Fr. Seraphim Rose, “The Search for Orthodoxy” (a talk given at the 1981 St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage), *The Orthodox Word*, no. 226 (2002), pp. 252–53.

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2. This brings us to the second prerequisite for preaching the Gospel in the modern world, and that is, we must *live* the Gospel.

Again, to quote from Fr. Seraphim: “There exists a false opinion, which unfortunately is all too widespread today, that it is enough to have an Orthodoxy that is limited to the church building and formal ‘Orthodox’ activities, such as praying at certain times and making the sign of the Cross; in everything else, so this opinion goes, one can be like anyone else; participating in the life and culture of our times without any problem, as long as we don’t commit sin.

“Anyone who has come to realize how deep Orthodoxy is, and how full is the commitment which is required of the serious Orthodox Christian, and likewise what totalitarian demands the contemporary world makes on us, will easily see how wrong this opinion is. One is Orthodox *all* the time, *every* day, in *every* situation of life, or one is not really Orthodox at all. Our Orthodoxy is revealed not just in our strictly religious views, but in everything we do and say. Most of us are very unaware of the Christian, religious responsibility we have for the seemingly *secular* part of our lives. The person with a truly Orthodox worldview lives every part of his life as Orthodox.”¹

As we go deeper into the Orthodox Christian life, with daily prayer, daily reading of spiritual books, regular attendance of Church services, and regular confession and reception of Holy Communion, we will see our entire lives transformed in this way. When we come before Christ every day and speak to Him with love and longing, we will find our relationship with Him deepen, so that He will live in us more fully. When we daily reestablish our connection with Jesus Christ in this way, it will become natural for us to follow His commandments throughout the day, in every aspect of our lives. Then His commandments—even the hardest ones, like loving those who spitefully use us (cf. Matt. 5:44)—will not seem burdensome to us.

¹ Fr. Seraphim Rose, “Living the Orthodox Worldview” (a talk given at the 1982 St. Herman Summer Pilgrimage), *The Orthodox Word*, no. 105 (1982), pp. 169–70.

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Through our life of Grace in the Church, we are to be continually transformed into the *likeness* of God, which is the likeness of Christ. We are to be united with God ever more fully by acquiring and assimilating His Grace, His Uncreated Energy.

For the Orthodox Church, salvation includes the forgiveness of sins and justification before God (cf. Eph. 1:7; Rom. 5:16, 18), but it is also more than these. It means to abide in Christ the God-man and have Him abiding in us (cf. John 15:4), to participate in the life of God Himself, to become *partakers of the Divine Nature* (II Peter 1:4) both in the present life and in eternity. In the language of Orthodox Patristic theology, to be saved ultimately means to be deified. As the Romanian Orthodox writer Fr. Dumitru Staniloae explains: “Deification is the passing of man from created things to the Uncreated, to the level of the Divine Energies.... Man assimilates more and more of the Divine Energies, without this assimilation ever ending, since he will never assimilate their Source itself, that is, the Divine Essence, and become God by Essence, or another Christ. In the measure in which man increases his capacity to become a subject of ever richer Divine Energies, these Energies from the Divine Essence are revealed to him in a greater proportion.”¹

In a similar vein, we can say that being Orthodox includes having the right beliefs, the right doctrines, the right worship, and the right interpretation of Scripture, but it is more than these. Being Orthodox means *being in the Church*. We should not only know this intellectually; we should feel it in the depths of our being. By the Grace of God, although we are sinful and unworthy, we are part of Christ’s Body; we are members of His one and only true Church. As such, we *believe* in the Church.

In order to communicate this belief in the Church to those outside the Church, we must experience what it means to be in the

¹ Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality* (South Canaan, Penna.: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002), p. 373.

Church. In other words, we must experience, gradually and a step at a time, what it means to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, to live in Christ and have Him live in us, to participate in His life, to be deified.

It is significant that, of all the Christian confessions, only the Orthodox Faith understands Grace to be the Uncreated Energy of God, in which God Himself is fully present. In the Orthodox Church, Grace is known to be God Himself. In the non-Orthodox confessions, on the other hand, the grace that is communicated is considered to be a created phenomenon. In Roman Catholic theology, it is said that grace cannot exist apart from the soul, and that it is only a “quality” of the soul.¹

When in the Orthodox Church we say that we are to be filled with Grace, that we are to acquire the Grace of the Holy Spirit, this means to be literally filled with God Himself. Only in the Orthodox Church do we know and confess that it is possible for a Christian to be deified in the sense of becoming god through His Grace—that is, not God by Nature and preeternal begetting, as only Christ was and is, but a god by Grace and adoption. This is what the Apostle John meant when he wrote in his Gospel: *As many as received Him [Christ], to them He gave the power to become sons of God, even to those who believe on His name* (John 1:12).

Yes, it is significant that only the Orthodox Church has this understanding of Grace and deification. But it is significant not just in the sense that only the Orthodox Church has the right views on these subjects. Most of all, it is important to consider *why* the Orthodox Church alone has the right understanding. Of course, one could say that it is because, as I’ve already mentioned, only the Orthodox Church is the true Church which Christ has preserved from error and heresy for two thousand years. But I would say that it is more than this. Does not the Orthodox Church alone have the right understanding of Grace and deification because she alone makes possible this full

¹ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1911 edition, vol. 6, p. 705.

participation in the life of God, this union with God, this deification? To be sure, those outside the Church can experience God's Grace. In fact, some Holy Fathers, such as St. Maximus the Confessor,¹ teach that nothing could exist for an instant without God's Grace. But full participation in God's Energies, as much as is possible for human nature, is only available in the Orthodox Church.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this talk, the Gospel of Christ is, most essentially, the good news that the central problem of the world—death, both bodily and spiritual—has been overcome by Jesus Christ. Through His Incarnation, His Death on the Cross, and His Resurrection, Christ has brought Life to the world; He has made it possible for man to live eternally with Him in His Kingdom—not only in soul, but also in body after the General Resurrection. Any Christian confession that has retained the basic teachings of Christianity will affirm this. But only in the Orthodox Church do we find the complete understanding and experience of this *salvation* that Christ has brought to the world, this *Life* that He has brought to the world (cf. John 11:25), this *Living Water* that He has promised to His followers (cf. John 7:38). This Life that Christ gives is the Life of God Himself—it is God Himself—and that is why the Saints and righteous ones of the Orthodox Church are known to be literally filled with God, to be deified by Him. And, in the General Resurrection, it will not only be the soul of man that will be deified; the body will be deified as well. Therefore, the Orthodox Holy Fathers have summed up the Gospel of Christ with a phrase that might seem surprising to Christians outside the Orthodox Church. “God became man,” they say, “so that man can become god.”

These considerations can help us to appreciate more fully why we, as Orthodox Christians, have a responsibility to preach the Gospel of Christ to those around us. We have the right teaching; we know—or

¹ See St. Maximus the Confessor, “Four Hundred Texts on Love” 3:27, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 87.

should know—what it means to be in the Church and believe in the Church; and we have all the means that Christ has made available to mankind to be saved—saved, that is, in the maximalist sense of being transformed, even deified, in order to be made fit for the everlasting Kingdom of Heaven.

Of course, we do not have to be fully deified—that is, fully and perfectly penetrated by God’s Energies—in order to preach the Gospel. All of us who have been baptized and chrismated Orthodox have already been deified to some extent, since we receive the Uncreated Energy of God united to our souls at Baptism; and all of us who receive Holy Communion experience a kind of deification. St. Symeon the New Theologian, who was deified in the full and strict sense of the word, affirmed that all those who partake of the Holy Mysteries “with sincerity of heart are quickened and deified”¹—that is, deified in the broader sense. We are to grow toward a more full deification, a more full participation in God throughout our whole lives. As we grow in this way, we will have more and more Grace to give to others when we preach the Gospel of Christ.

3. Now we come to the third prerequisite for preaching the Gospel in the modern world, and that is to *know the modern world*, or, more specifically, the modern Western society in which we find ourselves. Compared to the countries of Western Europe, our American society has retained a considerable Christian sector, but that sector is becoming smaller and smaller. Recent polls have found that every year, there are two million *fewer* Christians in America. At the same time, there are two million *more* people who say, “I’m not religious; I’m spiritual.” In other words, they are abandoning churches and are opting for a spirituality of their own devising: personalized spirituality.

Fr. Seraphim Rose identified the sickness of the modern world as “nihilism”: the abandonment of belief in absolute Truth, which is grounded in faith in God. As Fr. Seraphim taught, the philosophy of

¹ Preparatory Prayers for Holy Communion.

the modern age can be summed up in the following phrase: “God is dead, therefore man becomes God and everything is possible.”¹

We have to be aware of the effects of this underlying nihilistic philosophy on the life around us, and on ourselves. Although many people give lip service to God, they live as though He doesn’t exist. And we ourselves, sadly, if we will only admit it, also behave sometimes as if God doesn’t exist, being also under the influence of the spirit of the times.

If there is no God to Whom we are answerable and Who gives meaning and purpose to our lives, then our lives are all about “me”: what I want, my personal gratification, my personal fulfillment, my “quality of life.” According to this view, there is no absolute or objective meaning to life; there is only a relative or subjective meaning: what it means to me, how it suits me. This idea is very strong in our society; we breathe it in with the contemporary air, so to speak.

In preparing this talk, I was reading over the talks that Fr. Seraphim gave at our monastery nearly twenty-five years ago, which I have already been quoting from. Back then, he was saying that the current generation has been described as the “me” generation. Many of us here are from that generation. But what of the generations that have come after the “me” generation? They have been called “generation X” and “generation Y.” These generations have also grown up in a society characterized by a gradual loss of belief in absolute Truth and by a concurrent absorption in self-gratification. At the same time, noticeably more than the “me” generation, they have felt the angst of this empty philosophy of life. As society moves further away from God, we are supplied with more sophisticated ways of distracting us from the pain that comes from being separated from God, and more medications to numb that pain. Generation Y has more access to entertainments than

¹ *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works*, p. 396. Fr. Seraphim took this phrase from Friedrich Nietzsche and from the character Kirillov in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed*.

any other generation in history, but at the same time, with its use of antidepressants, it has been called the most medicated generation in human history.

In the meantime, to fill in the vacuum caused by the abandonment of Christian Faith, numerous forms of false spirituality have been on the rise for decades. Today, the fastest growing religion in the United States, in terms of percentage, is witchcraft. This is not unrelated to the fact that numerous movies, television shows, books, and games present young people with the idea that witchcraft is “cool” and “fun.” Members of Pagan and Wiccan groups say that, whenever a popular book, movie or TV show comes out with this theme, they get a surge of phone calls from young people.

This is only the latest sign of the times. There are many other such signs, from the growth of Eastern religions to the UFO subculture, to the pseudo-Christian experiences seen at such gatherings as the “Toronto Blessing.”

And, while all of this pseudo-spirituality is being put into the air, there is a concerted effort to obliterate what is left of traditional Christian society in contemporary America. Not a year goes by without several cover stories in such major national magazines as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News and World Report*, which attempt to undermine Christian faith under the guise of “objective” reporting. Not only is the reality of the Biblical account of creation and the global Flood rejected, but the historicity of the Prophet Moses is dismissed, the historicity of the Gospels are called into question, and the lives of Christ and His Apostles are reinterpreted according to heretical Gnostic notions which were condemned by the Church many centuries ago. The aim of these articles—and of much else of what we see and hear in the media nowadays—is to *denature* Christianity. In order to fit in with the nihilistic, secularistic, self-worshipping spirit of the times, Christianity must be reinterpreted so as to abandon any claims to absolute Truth, and to abandon faith in Christ as the *Only Begotten Son* of God. Instead, Christ is made out to be some kind of New Age guru who leads

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each of us to the realization that each one of us is God: not god by Grace as in the Orthodox understanding, but God by Nature in the New Age, Gnostic understanding. To a self-worshipping society for which absolute Truth has been replaced by “me,” nothing less than this false form of self-deification is satisfactory. It is precisely with this idea that Lucifer tempted Adam and Eve: *Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as Gods* (Gen. 3:5).

As we Orthodox Christians reach out to the modern world, we need to take into account this barrage of propaganda that is thrust on people in our society, that makes them forget God, give up on Christ as traditional Christianity understands Him, and live for themselves, live for this world only, live for today. It so happens that we Orthodox Christians have answers to all the misguided attempts to deny the historicity of the Old and New Testaments, and to turn Christianity into something that it is not. Books and articles have been written by Orthodox theological writers, historians, and scientists to defend the historical interpretation of Holy Scripture that is found in the writings of the Holy Fathers. Some of these only exist in Russian, Greek, or Serbian, but some are in English, and others will be translated. It can be helpful for us to avail ourselves of these materials in order to defend our Faith, but we must also realize that, ultimately, it is not arguments that persuade people to come to the Orthodox Church, but something that moves their hearts. And, to move hearts, we must first of all have our own hearts turned to God.

With all the so-called spirituality available to people today, which they can find literally at their fingertips on the internet, people’s souls are empty. They are desperately in need of the fullness of Christ’s Uncreated Grace, which only the Orthodox Church can give.

3. BEARING WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL

Now that we have looked at three prerequisites to preaching the Gospel in the modern world—knowing the Gospel, living the Gospel,

and knowing the modern world—we can now go on to discuss *how* to preach the Gospel.

In preaching the Gospel, we should not take the in-your-face approach that is occasionally found among Protestants. Sometimes Protestants will place pressure on people to convert. Perhaps this stems, at least in part, from the Calvinist doctrine that denies free will—even though most Protestant churches have rejected the strict interpretation of that doctrine. In any case, the Orthodox approach in preaching the Gospel is, contrary to Calvinism, to *honor* a person's free will just as God honors it. Our task is simply to bear witness to the Truth, and to make it available to others. Each person must make his own choice, without any coercion, as to whether or not to become a member of the Orthodox Church.

What does it mean to bear witness to our Faith? In one of the talks he gave toward the end of his life, Fr. Seraphim Rose said: "Once we are learning of the Orthodox Faith, we must be ready, as the Apostle Peter teaches, to give an account of it to those who may ask (cf. I Peter 3:15). Nowadays there is no one who is not asked at some time about his Faith. We must make our Faith something deep, conscious, and serious, so that we ourselves know why we are Orthodox—and this will already be an answer to those outside the Faith.

"And further, in our times of searching, we should be on the watch for those who are searching. We should be prepared to find them in the most unexpected places. We should be *evangelical*—and this does not mean just sticking Bible verses into one's conversation or asking everyone, 'Are you saved?' It means *living by the Gospel*, even with all our weaknesses and falls—*living the Orthodox Faith*. Many outsiders, just seeing that we try to lead a life different from the pagan and semi-pagan society around us, can become interested in the Faith just by this."¹

To illustrate this last point, I will relate a few stories. In the early

¹ Fr. Seraphim Rose, "The Search for Orthodoxy," p. 253.

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history of our brotherhood, some Orthodox pilgrims were on their way home from our monastery, when they stopped at a restaurant in Williams, California. Before the meal, they crossed themselves and prayed aloud. Some people at an adjacent table asked them what Faith they belonged to. They struck up a friendship with the Orthodox pilgrims, and went on to become Orthodox Christians themselves.

Just by doing such a simple things as making the sign of the Cross and praying, one can change the lives of those who are looking for something authentic in Christianity.

Here is another story which provides an even better example of what Fr. Seraphim said about “outsiders” becoming interested in the Orthodox Faith just by seeing us live that Faith. About five years ago, a young mother in Santa Rosa, California was in a toy store with her two-year-old son. As she was walking around looking at things, she saw a woman older than herself, modestly dressed, who had come to the store with her teenaged son. The young mother noticed that there was something different about this woman and her son. They were calm, peaceful, not distracted; but it was their relationship that impressed her most of all. The older mother and her teenaged son obviously had a close relationship; the boy showed respect and consideration for his mother, and she was kind and loving to him. The younger woman thought to herself: That’s the kind of relationship I want with my son when he gets older. So she went up to the other woman and asked her, “Do you go to a church?” It so happened that the older woman was the wife of a priest, and her church was in Santa Rosa. She talked with the younger woman, told her about her church, and told her that there was an Orthodox bookstore just a few blocks away. The young woman went directly to the bookstore, which serves as an outreach center for the Orthodox Faith, and talked with the man who runs the store. She then started attending the church with her husband and son, and in time they all became Orthodox. They still attend the church regularly, and now have another boy in the family.

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In discussing what it means to bear witness to our Faith, we should emphasize that, in all situations, we must act and speak with love. Christ told His disciples: *By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another* (John 13:35). We have the fullness of Truth, yes, but this Truth must be spoken and given in love, lest it be corrupted in the very manner in which it is presented. People will look for God in us, and if they see no love there, they will not recognize the presence of God, even if we know all the Orthodox dogmas and can recite Scripture verses and the Nicene Creed by heart.

Fr. Seraphim stressed this in one of his talks. He said: “Being filled with the Gospel teaching and trying to live by it, we should have love and compassion for the miserable humanity of our days. Probably never have people been more unhappy than the people of our days, even with all the outward conveniences and gadgets our society provides us with. People are suffering and dying for the lack of God—and we can help give God to them. The love of many has truly grown cold in our days—but let us not be cold. As long as Christ sends us His Grace and warms our hearts, we do not need to be cold. If we are cold and indifferent; if our response to the need for a Christian answer to those who are miserable is only: ‘Who cares? Let someone else do it; I don’t feel like it’ (and I have heard Orthodox people say those very things!)—then we are the salt that has lost its savor and is good for nothing but to be thrown out (cf. Matt. 5:13).”¹

May these words warm our hearts, so that we will go forth and bear witness to the Orthodox Gospel with love—a love that flows from our relationship with Jesus Christ, and from the Grace He bestows on us in His Church.

¹ Ibid., pp. 253–54.